

MALACHI—The teachings of Pope John Paul (RATIONALISM) will be updated elsewhere.

What Has Become of The "History of Salvation"?

Interviewer:

Taking advantage of the freedom you have granted me, I will continue to ask questions that might, perhaps, seem strange to you. As you have observed, however, they are questions asked by many of our contemporaries, who, confronted with the message of the Gospel which the Church continues to proclaim, ask themselves: Why does the "history of salvation" (as Christians refer to it) appear so complicated? In order to pardon us and to save us, did a God who is a loving Father really need to sacrifice cruelly his own Son?



Pope John Paul II:

Your question, concerning the history of salvation, touches upon the most profound significance of redemptive salvation. Let's begin by looking at the history of European thought after Descartes. I put Descartes in the forefront because he marks the beginning of a new era in the history of European thought and because this philosopher, who is certainly among the greatest that France has given the world, inaugurated the great anthropocentric shift in philosophy. "I think, therefore I am," as previously mentioned, is the motto of modern rationalism.

All the rationalism of the last centuries—as much in its Anglo-Saxon expression as in its Continental expression in Kantianism, Hegelianism, and the German philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to Husserl and Heidegger—can be considered a continuation and an expansion of Cartesian positions. The author of *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* with his ontological proofs, distanced us from the philosophy of existence, and also from the traditional approaches of Saint Thomas which lead to God who is "autonomous existence," *Ipsum esse subsistens*. By making subjective consciousness absolute, Descartes moves instead toward pure consciousness of the Absolute, which is pure thought. Such an Absolute is not autonomous existence, but rather autonomous thought. Only that which corresponds to human thought makes sense. The objective truth of this thought is not as important as the fact that something exists in human consciousness.

We find ourselves on the threshold of modern immanentism and subjectivism. Descartes marks the beginning of the development of the exact and natural sciences as well as of the humanistic sciences in their new

expression. He turns his back on metaphysics and concentrates on the philosophy of knowledge. Kant is the most notable representative of this movement.

Though the father of modern rationalism certainly cannot be blamed for the move away from Christianity, it is difficult not to acknowledge that he created the climate in which, in the modern era, such an estrangement became possible. It did not happen right away, but gradually.

In fact, about 150 years after Descartes, all that was fundamentally Christian in the tradition of European thought had already been pushed aside. This was the time of the Enlightenment in France, when pure rationalism held sway. The French Revolution, during the Reign of Terror, knocked down the altars dedicated to Christ, tossed crucifixes into the streets, introduced the cult of the goddess Reason. On the basis of this, there was a proclamation of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The spiritual patrimony and, in particular, the moral patrimony of Christianity were thus torn from their evangelical foundation. In order to restore Christianity to its full vitality, it is essential that these return to that foundation.

Nevertheless, the process of turning away from the God of the Fathers, from the God of Jesus Christ, from the Gospel, and from the Eucharist did not bring about a rupture with a God who exists outside of the world. In fact, the God of the deists was always present; perhaps he was even present in the French Encyclopedists, in the work of Voltaire and of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and even more so in Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, which marked the beginning of modern physics. This God, however, is decidedly a God outside of the world. To a mentality shaped by a naturalistic consciousness of the world, a God present in the world appeared useless; similarly, a God working through man turned out to be useless to modern knowledge, to the modern science of man, which examines the workings of the conscious and the subconscious. The rationalism of the Enlightenment put to one side the true God—in particular, God the Redeemer.

The consequence was that man was supposed to live by his reason alone, as if God did not exist. Not only was it necessary to leave God out of the objective knowledge of the world, since the existence of a Creator or of Providence was in no way helpful to science, it was also necessary to act as if God did not exist, as if God were not interested in the world. The rationalism of the Enlightenment was able to accept a God outside of the world primarily because it was an unverifiable hypothesis. It was crucial, however, that such a God be expelled from the world.